



DELAWARE

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PRESS RELEASE

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DelDOT Saves Money by Going “Virtual”

New Project Communication Process More Efficient, Effective

Dover – The Department of Transportation (DelDOT) is continuing its cost savings efforts in the new year by transitioning when appropriate from “live” public workshops to “virtual” public workshops. Virtual workshops are a less costly way for DelDOT to interact with the community about upcoming transportation projects.

This new workshop format is one tool in the Departments’ tool kit to more efficiently and effectively communicate with the public, at various stages of a project’s life cycle. Other ways include:

- DelDOT Web site
- Zip code mailings
- Door-to-door visits
- Neighborhood postings
- Temporary displays in local public buildings
- Targeted meetings with stakeholders
- Press releases
- Newspaper advertisements

In 2008, there were 50 public workshops and/or hearings. The main expenses were DelDOT staff overtime/compensatory time, outside firm time, room rental fees, and fuel costs. Under the new process, DelDOT expects that many of the above costs will nearly be eradicated. DelDOT’s goal is to be more effective and efficient communicators. It should be noted that hearings required by law will continue to be held.

The centerpiece communication tool is the virtual public workshop, a Web page that includes information about a proposed transportation project with an added bonus: the public is able to submit a project-specific questionnaire or survey directly online. The project’s description, design plans, detour routes, and current photographs (as available) will also be posted. When appropriate and practical, there will be a multimedia component where a DelDOT representative will explain the project through an audio or video feature (all created in-house).

“DelDOT is committed to informing the public about transportation projects,” DelDOT Secretary Carolann Wicks said. “What we are calling ‘virtual’ public workshops will continue to inform the community because the Web pages will have all the information that we bring to ‘live’ public workshops. DelDOT personnel will continue to find ways to be more cost efficient and still communicate with the public.”

A typical live workshop is limited to the hours of 4 to 7 p.m. on a weekday. The virtual workshops are a more convenient way to learn about upcoming transportation projects. Constituents can read and review the design plans 24 hours per day, 7 days per week from the comfort of their personal computer. While there will be

deadlines to submit comments at www.deldot.gov, constituents will have several weeks to review the proposals before the due date.

The Sandy Bend Road bridge project is the inaugural virtual public workshop because the project affects a relatively small number of residents and businesses in Maryland. The virtual workshop goes live Jan. 29. Typically, public workshops for small bridge projects are not well attended. The bridge project's description, design plans, and current photographs will be posted on DelDOT's Web site with the added feature where the public can submit project-related comments online. All comments are reviewed by the project manager and other staff. Furthermore, there is a video presentation describing the virtual workshop feature and bridge project.

This project is also a good fit for a virtual workshop because the proposed improvements to the bridge over Tappahanna Ditch are minor. While the bridge's substructure is in good condition, repairs will be made to the bridge's deteriorating beams. In addition, riprap will be placed in the stream for scour protection, the existing guardrail will be removed and replaced, and the approaches will be reconstructed. The design phase is to be complete in spring 2009 with an anticipated construction completion date of fall 2009. A detour will be in place for up to 60 days. Comments are due March 1.

Live workshops in facilities closer to higher-profile projects like Indian River Inlet Bridge and Route 301 will continue. These meetings are more popular and better attended, warranting the expense. These projects might utilize a virtual feature in addition to a live workshop.

Those who do not have Internet access may call DelDOT at (800) 652-5600 or (302) 760-2080 to learn and ask questions about projects. Comments will still be accepted by postal mail addressed to DelDOT Public Relations, P.O. Box 778, Dover DE 19903. Businesses and residents directly impacted by projects will continue to receive notification by postal mail.

For the latest in traffic and related information, visit DelDOT's Web site at www.deldot.gov or tune to WTMC-AM 1380.

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